

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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MEMORANDUM FOR BRONSON, TWEEDY

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SUBJECT: Interviews of NSC/White House Staff Members

Over the course of last year I interviewed members of the NSC and White House staffs concerning the intelligence support they and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs receive. Eight senior staff members were involved, plus several of their assistants. Three major issues were discussed:

- What intelligence support does Kissinger need?
- How well satisfied are you with the intelligence products received?
- How could you better be served? In what directions would you like to see improvements?

I have paraphrased their comments and attempted to summarize their feelings as accurately as possible. Most of those interviewed were reasonably well satisfied with the support they get. A few clearly were not. All had suggestions for improvements. The focus of the interviews tended to concentrate on eliciting these.

My hope is that this memorandum is an effective way of conveying the major themes that emerged. At a later date I will send you a memorandum containing my reactions to the entire interviewing record.

I. General Observations

A. Sensitivity to Consumer Needs

-- "...the energy and devotion of the intelligence community had gone downhill recently...are now routine producers of fairly routine products."

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-- "CIA is basically passive, but responsive. The passivity is reflected in the lack of energy devoted to finding out what particular customers really do need, what they think of the product. On the other hand, if one asks them for information, for help, they are very responsive within their limits ... The Agency's perception of what is at issue, what the relevant questions are, what the most relevant and useful insights and information are is rather poor. The CIA often misses a chance to provide useful inputs. In particular, (I note) the importance of negotiations with other governments as an area and as a focus of NSC interest. The CIA people do not seem to perceive this as a major problem area for the NSC staff and/or for Kissinger. They do not show any imagination in tailoring their products to the special needs of particular negotiations."

-- "... intelligence analysts assume an awful lot of background on the part of the readers ... They write on things of interest to them, rather than trying to understand the needs of their consumers and doing what is required to communicate with them."

-- "... with respect to the China trip, the preparation by the community was fairly good and there were no surprises. The biographic reporting was good and the [redacted] studies were useful."

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-- "... last year, that is 1971, a great deal of effort was spent at the White House examining the analytical basis of our information on Vietnam ... the validity of the techniques of analysis, the data and conclusions drawn from the data ... the community ought to have sorted all of this out earlier ... "

-- "... what intelligence is really paid for (is) to get the message through, but the fact is that the uncertainties, the incentive system, analysts' training and organizational writing styles lead to very hedged and muffled statements of conclusions in most intelligence products."

B. Communication

-- "... tried to communicate critical comments and ... views derived from contact with Kissinger or other staff members to people in the CIA, usually at high levels ... In many cases, the response has been one of a certain amount of bristling hostility, and an unwillingness in some cases to listen to the criticism."

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-- " ... there is a good deal of fuzziness in the expression of the results of intelligence analysis in typical products ... I go over many pages in a typical report and put a few sentence summary on the top of it for Henry's use. I try to distill the essence of the document from Henry's point of view. What is in the document that he needs to know? Partly the problem is the CIA style of writing, partly it is that the analysts ... do not have enough of a picture of what Kissinger wants and needs ... analysts never ask themselves what Henry really needs; the documents are never specifically tailored to a particular audience. Analysts should ask themselves in some cases, if I had five minutes with Henry Kissinger on this subject, what would I say to him? ... this would cover only one kind of communication need ... there is a very significant place ... for much lengthier in-depth analyses. The main point is not that all products should be brief, but that there should be first-rate summaries. The typical intelligence product does not have one ... If (I) can regularly squeeze down what is needed onto one 5X8 note-size page ... the typical summary is much too long. Moreover, it is not hard-hitting enough whatever its length. In addition (I) had a discussion with ... (an individual on Kissinger's personal staff) in which (this individual's) response to a particular document was to exclaim 'they won't come out and say what they really mean.' "

C. Who Is the Consumer?

-- " ... it is very important that the intelligence community be more responsive, and ... not have an unrealistic view of its readership ... primary readership is the staffs of people like Kissinger, the Secretary of State, etc. ... have got to stop thinking that Kissinger, or the President, is going to read their products. They may in very selective cases, but they cannot be viewed as the primary readers."

-- " ... the CIA Office of Current Intelligence refuses to perceive that their product is not read by Kissinger and the President ... The OCI people should really think of themselves as ... feeding the real current intelligence process in the White House. They could get feedback and fit into the system if they were willing to do it on that basis. They refuse to do so ... The CIA has tended all along to cultivate the notion that it writes directly for the national leaders. Their real audience ... is almost always the staffs and not the decisionmakers."

-- " ... in general, readership of longer studies, or in-depth studies, is chancy, at least if you think of your audience as Kissinger or the President."

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D. Kissinger as the Consumer

Note: The recurring theme in my discussions concerning Kissinger's reading habits was that he read material which was recommended by the NSC staff or friends and on topics of current interest. Few people really know what he reads beyond the daily package assembled by the White House Situation Room, but it was obvious that intelligence products were screened by the staff and condensed because of the limited time he had available.

-- "... (Kissinger) does not read the NIE's, indeed, does not read much... beyond current reporting, except for occasional items put in his briefcase for reading on weekends or in preparation for special trips, assignments, etc."

-- "... no information on his reading habits... nor of his specific reaction to products. Indirect evidence suggested... that he did read a good deal, especially things other people sent him with a recommendation..."

-- "... had no feedback on his reaction to the intelligence he receives, nor information on what he reads... He read all of the China trip material and also a number of books."

II. Current Intelligence Products

A. Quality of Analysis

-- "The CIB is all right for spot reporting, but it tends to over-dramatize individual events... it provides no real feel for what is really happening... one receives an erratic picture of the movement of events, of major trends, etc. ..."

-- "... the current style of reporting, which emphasizes short newsworthy items, gives an exaggerated picture of the instability, the conflict in a particular area. It leads to an image of the political situation in a country being more vulnerable and unstable than it is because of the bias of such reporting, which highlights change, or incipient change.

-- "... (I am) considerably less happy with the OCI reporting... generally give the material... poor marks as to the level of analysis that it displays."

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-- (Reference to Indo-Pak crisis) "Something was definitely wrong. We were far too relaxed until too late...the message with regard to what was happening, even if correct, would not have gotten through...(the) tendency (is) that 'once events start moving, as in the later part of the Indo-Pak crisis, (one) receives a steady stream of factual intelligence reporting...But the analytical stuff just quits... Maybe there are some good analytical pieces produced, but they are not attended to...they either drown in the flow or are reduced to a trickle."

B. Volume of Current Production

-- "...a general injunction should be given to keep the bulk down."

-- "Current intelligence needs are met, indeed...there is an oversupply...The resources in OCI could be devoted to much better uses. There is a need to understand that Kissinger's focus is crisis-oriented, highly focused at any one time on the problems that he faces. He does not need OCI to try to keep monitoring the world and giving him daily news...adequate alternative sources are cables, the NSC staff materials, the Situation Room current intelligence effort. The alternative uses (OCI) could be put to are...to alert top-level staffs to new and emerging problems."

C. Economic Intelligence

-- "...collection of economic intelligence abroad is poor, and we do not effectively exploit the information that could be available to us through business corporations."

-- "...the White House really needs more information on economic and financial intelligence than it now gets...(I) receive the State Department Current Economic Issues publication. CIA should do a comparable job and they probably have a superior capability."

-- "...in the area of (estimating the) economic performance of (a certain nation)...there were considerable problems; especially after having been there...(I am) dubious as to the accuracy and validity of the estimates of...economic output in 1971 (by intelligence. These were) not very thoughtful."

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-- "In the area of economic, financial and commercial intelligence, the Economist is the best single source... Other good sources are the New York Times financial pages, the Financial Times of London, etc... in terms of overall appraisals and insights into what was really happening, the publicly published materials are significantly superior to the CIA products."

III. National Intelligence Estimates

A. Readership

-- "There are relatively few NIE's that are specific (to my area. I) read all of the NIE's."

-- "(I do) not read NIE's, none in the last two years... (and have) no urge to ask for SNIE's... (Kissinger) initially did read some NIE's, but for the last 2-1/2 years has not read any."

-- "(I) keep tabs on the NIE's and keep them... long enough to go through them, at least to turn the pages... very interested in estimates in the military area... estimates of other sorts are essentially of no value."

B. Quality

-- "...the NIE's are spotty, too terse and muffled in their presentation... too narrow in their focus and there is no longer-term trend analysis."

-- "...there is an ONE philosophical bias not to over-react to events. A good position in general, but it has been pushed too far in important cases."

-- "...generally like the NIE's... and the special subject reports included in the Intelligence Memoranda... (I) find these useful, and sometimes send them to Kissinger in the hope that he will read them."

IV. Types of Products Needed

A. In-Depth Analysis

-- "...the need (is) for more focus on long-term trends, rather than on snapshots of specific happenings or events... In-depth intelligence

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studies should provide new intellectual furniture, provide special new insights and hypotheses, etc. They should not be just general background histories of events, but analytically focused on particular policy problems, or issues, that can be useful to decisionmakers."

-- "...from time to time special requests for in-depth studies could prove very useful...occasionally a specialized study drawing on the full depth of information and analytic capabilities of CIA and the intelligence community has had significant payoff."

-- "There do not seem to be any really in-depth studies, that is, the equivalent of a book on China, or some major figure."

-- "What role is there for in-depth, analytic studies?...if they were more relevant and focused on key problems, they could be very valuable...most research currently is on out-of-date topics, people are going back and looking at an historical event and researching it in considerable depth. But the analysis of a past event does not profit from the standard kind of historical treatment...the topics are out of date, and also the analysis does not focus on particular issues or problems."

-- "In-depth analysis of problems is almost totally lacking...the function of in-depth analysis is to suggest what to look for, how to interpret the fragmentary information that one receives in the daily reporting. For example, after the Egyptians had pushed out the Soviets, one might have speculated: what is going to happen now? A possible Soviet shift to Syria or Iraq presented interesting scenarios. These scenarios then provide a context within which one looks for clues in the stream of data...They allow one to interpret pieces of data that otherwise are meaningless."

-- "...more effort should be devoted to something like Hal Ford's special research group. Kissinger needs in-depth and trend analysis."

-- "...there is a need for more long-range studies...focused on political, economic, sociological trends...ought to be more attention given to Latin America viewed as an area...for the interaction of the separate countries, (and) considering the role of external nations, the French, the Germans, the Soviets, the Chinese, etc...There is...a tendency to treat Latin America as a U.S. province and to think...in terms of U.S. and a particular country's bilateral relations."

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B. Speculative Analyses

-- "...would very much like to see more speculative material...that would be useful in approaching major policy issues... academics attempt to do it, but with much less information. Top-level staffs attempt to do it for their bosses...(but) the result is to put the intelligence community into a role of supplying only the facts."

-- "...another problem with...intelligence (is) the unwillingness to hazard opinion, to speculate."

-- "...would like to get more of the internal...product which is current, uninhibited, and...contains discussion of alternative interpretations of new data..."

-- Agreed to the need for speculative products and noted "such speculation will not itself be risky. The policymakers are not going to hit the speculators over the head later if it has been made clear that these are alternative and speculative hypotheses...only the intelligence people have the time, and in some cases the background, to put forward sophisticated hypotheses about the significance and meaning of the things that are observed... they currently are missing a chance to provide a significant service to the top leadership."

C. Different Interpretations

-- "...on complex, difficult issues the decisionmakers do not want a consensus view, unless in the exceptional circumstance where everyone in the community really agrees. What is needed is well expounded views of the conflicting positions, a sorting out of the points of agreement, a presentation of the relevant disagreements, a clear separation of facts, opinions and judgments. The worst possible situation is one in which a consensus is forced and brought to the top."

D. Intelligence Should Emphasize Its Comparative Advantage

-- "(Intelligence) has to focus more clearly on areas where they have a significant comparative advantage...they...need to perceptively take account of what the competitive sources of information have to offer (to decisionmakers, and) capitalize on the strong points of their particular

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sources of information... (and) the kinds of analyses that only they have the capability and the time to do... For example, as an administration learns and develops sources of information, especially as regards political information, the character of its need for certain kinds of intelligence and background information shifts. At the very beginning, it needs to be brought up to speed, and background provided for many of the top leadership. But that as it progresses through time, it doesn't need the same sort of things. In that respect, the character of intelligence products ought to be cyclical and tied to the time in office of the key leaders it is serving."

-- (Reference Egypt's expulsion of Soviet forces) "... suggested that (AWM) get Le Monde and compare it with the intelligence analysis. Le Monde has done a significantly better job than any U.S. intelligence organization, first in being alert to the onset of the crisis, and then in its coverage after it happened."

-- "Analysts should try to perceive the real life market for their products, understand... the decision processes into which their products go, and on this basis seek an area of comparative advantage... top-level decisionmakers feel they know the essential aspects of policy problems... They know key items of information or aspects of the situation that analysts are not privy to... (but) the analyst knows things they don't know. However, analysts... discredit themselves by trying to compete where they have no comparative advantage. For example, they may in some cases try to guess the whole story of a particular episode as a prelude to their analysis, rather than contributing distinctive insights based on what they do know. The natural tendency is to want to give the whole picture rather than give partial insights based upon specialized in-depth studies. However, the latter may be the area in which intelligence analysts in fact have the comparative advantage."

E. Periodic Wrap-Ups

-- "... deplore the fact that there is no end of the month survey which would wrap up and analyze events."

-- "... rather than current reporting, there are needs for materials focused on trends, wrap-ups, more analytic pieces putting daily events in perspective."

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-- "...we need an antidote to the daily reporting, perhaps in the form of a weekly or monthly roundup, that is focused on major, systemic trends and on basic indicators of the state of nations, governments, etc."

-- "...every area desk should put out a roundup every ten days. CIA, though selective, provides...interesting publications that do make some attempt to tie things together, plus giving some view of the interaction between various actors on the international stage."

-- "...like to see much more exploration of long-term considerations related to developing trends, policy implications, etc."

F. Products Which Flag Issues of Impending Importance

-- "...there is no effort to flag impending issues. For example,... at a conference on Majorca which a number of people from the oil companies (attended)...all...agreed that oil production was already at its highest possible level...if there was a cold winter in Europe, we would have the first of...a series of European oil crises...there had been no news of this in any of the intelligence materials I had seen."

-- "...one of the most important improvements could come from an early focus on potential issues, enough in advance so that in-depth intelligence analysis...can be done...it would be important if we could forecast issues and problems, then have some procedure for getting analysis done on them."

-- "...some special alerting to important events in the future is also useful."

G. Personality and Organizational Analyses

-- "...even after someone like Kissinger knows particular leaders, he still has a need for and would welcome tactical information that would allow him to deal better with a particular leader. This might include recent information about him, about his health, or insightful material from first-rate psychological personality studies. All this additional information is aimed at giving him a better chance of influencing the behavior of particular leaders in directions required by U.S. policy. Along this line it would be useful to have in-depth studies of the forces at work on foreign leaders, within the top-level Soviet decision processes, etc."

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-- "...improved exploitation of materials from the Soviet press...or other materials to do more detailed studies of the Soviet bureaucracy (would) provide new background insights for top-level people...it would be of special interest to have an analysis of the efforts and actions of Dobrynin, other Soviet spokesmen, and Soviet visitors who attempt to influence U.S. domestic opinion."

-- "...the UK and Japanese appear to have developed a sophisticated view of U.S. decisionmaking processes, interest groups, etc. We do not have a comparable view of their decision processes, or interest groups."

-- "...In periods of crisis, one needs to understand (explain) the actions, behavior, and the motives of another government...our own government, when acting under pressure, cannot be characterized by any simple clearcut model of decisionmaking...there is a consistent problem of oversimplification in our attempts to describe and analyze the behavior of other governments."

H. Special Study Suggestions

-- Studies of issues with a longer-term focus: "...an example would be the...major changes in Soviet society over the next decade that may limit Soviet capabilities to pursue external affairs -- nationality problems, birthrate decline of Russian ethnic groups, etc. What do the Soviet leaders worry about? What surfaces in their long-range planning studies?"

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-- China: "...would like to see, in addition to an attempt to understand upper-level decision processes and policies: (1) a better feel for the state of the country, especially as regards a better picture of regional affairs, (2) delineation of the interest groups in Chinese society and in the Chinese governmental structures, (3) more speculation of why things happen and likely future trends."

-- Military aid programs: "...claims put forward by foreign governments for increased military aid, or for different technology than we are currently giving them...take up a good deal of NSC staff time... This is not at all reflected in the character of the CIA product."

-- "...publish collections of key telegrams and items on areas of on-going interest. For example, items they have picked up regarding some of the past Presidential trips. These could provide a working document for people...to use as a handbook of reference material, sources."

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